United Nations A/68/304

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 August 2013

Original: English

Sixty-eighth session
Item 69 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Effective promotion of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/166, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its sixty-eighth session a report on the implementation of the resolution, including information on activities undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Independent Expert on minority issues and relevant United Nations entities, within existing resources, as well as by Member States, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The anniversary afforded an important opportunity to examine how the Declaration has served the purpose of advancing the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. The report provides an outline of activities undertaken to promote the implementation of the Declaration and to raise awareness of its provisions. The activities highlighted effective practices and challenges that should be addressed in strengthening implementation at the national, regional and international levels.

* A/68/150.

13-42361 (E) 120913

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The year 2012 marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption by consensus of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. In its resolution 66/166, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its sixty-eighth session a report on the implementation of the resolution, including information on activities undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Independent Expert on minority issues and relevant United Nations entities, within existing resources, as well as by Member States, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration.

2. Inspired by article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Declaration provides essential international human rights standards pertaining to the promotion and protection of minorities. Its nine articles contain broad principles that offer guidance to States in meeting their obligations. Unfortunately, the reality in many countries demonstrates that stronger commitments need to be secured on the part of all stakeholders, and States in particular, to build more inclusive and viable societies.

3. Article 1 of the Declaration stipulates that States are to protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and are to encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity. While the Declaration itself is not legally binding, article 27 of the Covenant and article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child offer strong treaty norms with regard to minority rights, similar to standards contained in the Declaration.

4. The twentieth anniversary of the Declaration afforded an important opportunity to examine achievements and challenges in its implementation. As to achievements, the Declaration has led to recognition by States of minority status, protection of minorities in the light of their vulnerable circumstances, reduction of exclusion and discrimination and, ultimately, recognition that minority rights are key factors in peacebuilding, prevention of conflict and poverty reduction. The remaining challenges include reticence on the part of many States to recognize minority status, which in and of itself often results in violations of the human rights of minorities at many levels and in various areas of life; discrimination; and exclusion and lack of access to opportunities, carrying the consequence of tensions that could escalate into conflict and that could be prevented through a better implementation of the Declaration.

5. Taking the above observations into consideration, OHCHR and human rights bodies and mechanisms, including the Independent Expert on minority issues and the Forum on Minority Issues, in addition to Governments, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and minorities themselves, engaged in various commemorative activities to mark the anniversary of the Declaration. In the process, stocktaking of good practices that could be replicated to further contribute to promoting minority rights in regional and national contexts, in conjunction with the identification of gaps and how they could be addressed, made the commemoration a success. Awareness-raising activities brought visibility to the Declaration and could be used to catalyse greater engagement on minority rights more generally.

II. United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities

6. Article 9 of the Declaration states that the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system are to contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles set forth therein, within their respective fields of competence. In this connection and in the lead-up to the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration, the Secretary-General, on 6 March 2012, endorsed the establishment of a United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities to enhance dialogue and cooperation between relevant United Nations departments, agencies, programmes and funds and, within 12 months, to develop a guidance note for the United Nations system on how to tackle racial discrimination and protection of minorities in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other important standards, drawing on effective practices.

7. Coordinated by OHCHR, the 20-member network produced a guidance note with 19 recommendations reflecting concerns emanating from such key areas as human rights protection, elections, constitution drafting, conflict prevention, delivery of humanitarian assistance and sustainable development. Following its endorsement by the Secretary-General, the network is finalizing an action plan for the implementation of the guidance note in cooperation with field presences.

III. Twentieth anniversary commemorative activities

8. In the course of 2012, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted, in public statements and keynote addresses, the importance to be attached to the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration. She also voiced concerns regarding the situations of specific minorities, including the Roma in Europe and religious minorities around the world.

A. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

9. The Office seized the momentum offered by the anniversary and organized, in cooperation with United Nations partners and representatives of Governments, non-governmental organizations and minorities, various activities devoted to the anniversary. A communication strategy that included media tools to raise awareness of the Declaration and deliver information on the activities was developed by OHCHR, in collaboration with the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat. A special section of the OHCHR website was dedicated to the anniversary; a distinctive visual identity was created; branded promotional materials (banners, posters and folders) were made available in the six official languages of the United Nations; web feature stories on minority issues were published; press statements of the High Commissioner that focused primarily on minorities were posted; a video interview with the Independent Expert on minority issues focusing on the anniversary was posted; and a compilation of the recommendations issued by the Forum on Minority Issues and branded with the anniversary logo was published in English, French and Spanish.

1. Human Rights Council panel discussion to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration

10. In its resolution 18/3, the Human Rights Council decided to convene, at its nineteenth session, a panel discussion to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration, with a particular focus on its implementation as well as on achievements, best practices and challenges in that regard.

11. The panel discussion was held on 13 March 2012, chaired by Christian Strohal, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations Office at Geneva and Vice-President of the Human Rights Council. The opening statement was delivered by the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. Mark Lattimer, Executive Director of Minority Rights Group International, moderated the panel discussion. The panellists were Rita Izsák, the Independent Expert on minority issues; Soyata Maiga, a member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa; Joshua Castellino, Professor of Law and Dean of the School of Law at Middlesex University, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and Pastor Elías Murillo Martínez, a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The panel discussion was organized around the four pillars of the Declaration: protection of existence; protection and promotion of identity; equality and non-discrimination; and right to effective participation.

(a) First part of the discussion

12. The moderator noted that, while the Declaration provided authoritative guidance and key standards on minority rights ranging from non-discrimination to participation in decision-making, its visibility remained limited and its provisions rarely invoked by practitioners. He asked the panellists what measures could be taken by various actors, including the Human Rights Council, to improve the promotion of the Declaration and encourage its implementation.

13. A central theme of the discussion was the significant role of education, and in particular human rights education, in raising awareness of minority rights. The panellists reiterated that there was a need to ensure that diversity in a given population was reflected in educational curricula and teaching materials, thereby encouraging familiarity with the various ethnicities, religions, languages and cultures, in order to combat exclusion and encourage participation.

14. The important roles of national human rights institutions, civil society organizations and minorities themselves in monitoring the implementation of the Declaration were underlined. In the light of the commitment of the United Nations system to addressing minority rights, the panellists recommended that specialized agencies and other organizations should contribute to the realization of the rights and principles set forth in the Declaration within their respective fields of competence.

15. It was noted that the commitment of the Human Rights Council to bringing visibility to the Declaration and strengthening its implementation was demonstrated through, among other things, its establishment of the Forum on Minority Issues in 2007. The importance of the forum lies in the fact that it provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation, in addition to making thematic contributions and providing expertise to the mandate of the Independent Expert on minority issues.

(b) Second part of the discussion

16. In response to a question about her role in encouraging more States to take additional measures and create institutional arrangements to protect the existence of minorities and accommodate diversity within society, the Independent Expert on minority issues reiterated that it was imperative to implement the Declaration, stating that protection of the rights of minorities not only safeguarded their physical existence and identity but, as the preamble to the Declaration asserted, also contributed to the political and social stability of States in which minorities lived. She underlined the obligation of Governments and sometimes the international community under international law to protect the physical existence of minorities. She mentioned various circumstances that could threaten the very existence of minorities in a State, including forced assimilation rather than integration and restrictions imposed on minorities in practising their own religion and openly using or learning their mother tongue.

17. Responding to a request to comment on the protection and promotion of linguistic minority identity, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa asserted that minorities should have access to legal and public administrative manuals in their mother tongue, noting that the right to effective due process could not be secured in a language not truly understood. She stressed that, the financial constraints imposed on many national education systems notwithstanding, greater effort should be made to conduct primary and adult education of national minorities in the mother tongue. Developing language programmes open to all and of all ages would offer the opportunity for society to benefit also from the contributions of women belonging to minorities.

18. Asked to discuss the role of special measures in tackling the effects of long-standing and entrenched discrimination of minorities, Mr. Murillo Martínez referred to general recommendation No. 32 of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which dealt with special measures and positive measures under articles 1 (4) and 2 (2) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. He said that, according to Committee, the obligation to adopt special measures was distinct from the general positive obligation of States parties to the Convention to secure human rights and fundamental freedoms on a non-discriminatory basis for persons and groups subject to their jurisdictions. The legitimacy of special measures or positive action was based on factual evidence, demonstrating a need to ensure the adequate development and protection of certain racial groups or individuals belonging thereto in order to guarantee their full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Those measures were to be founded on elements of proportionality and temporality, meaning that they were to be discontinued once the objectives for which they had been taken had been achieved. Special measures or positive action had been adopted as a good practice in many countries, he noted.

19. Commenting on the role of effective participation of minorities, Mr. Castellino said that minorities were often excluded from participation because they were perceived as a threat. Diversity in society constituted an important economic asset not to be underestimated. He called upon States to adopt robust legislative, administrative and judicial mechanisms to tackle political exclusion at the national level. In his view, the importance of protection of existence was followed closely by the right to effective political participation, allowing for all voices to be heard. He

stressed that support for the Forum on Minority Issues and consideration of the adoption of a binding international standard would be extremely fruitful in mainstreaming minority issues in human rights practice.

(c) General comments from representatives of States and civil society

20. The discussion highlighted the importance of the commentary to the Declaration prepared by Asbjørn Eide, the former Chair of the Working Group on Minorities of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and adopted by the Working Group (E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2005/2).

21. Some States pointed to policies and actions that they had implemented and those that they intended to adopt in order to ensure the representation and participation of minorities in social, economic and political life. Measures such as constitutional guarantees translated into special measures or positive action were underlined as key to access by minorities to high-quality education and higher education and, ultimately, to employment involving decision-making.

22. The importance of education in minority languages was regarded as a precondition for the preservation of minority cultural identity. It was stated that facilitating opportunities for education of and in minority languages could result in an education system able to offer equal opportunities in the labour market for graduates from both the majority and minority parts of the population. States had a duty and a responsibility to support and facilitate the use of minority languages. Reservations and a quota system could also serve to ensure fair representation of all communities in all State apparatus and decision-making bodies.

23. Awareness-raising was also highlighted as a significant tool in promoting respect for diversity and could itself lead to peaceful coexistence. Several participants referred to the current world of globalization and the interdependence of States and communities, noting that States that abided by the Declaration and invested in the integration of minorities often prospered, while those that pursued exclusion along national, ethnic, religious or cultural lines were exposed to internal conflicts and were likely to decline.

24. State policies that negatively affected the identity of ethnic and religious minorities were denounced. The participants noted that stigmatization and negative profiling hampered the exercise by minorities of their fundamental human rights, including to manifest and practise their religions. Given that the existence of minorities was most threatened in times of great societal change, as was being experienced in several regions, it was vital for religious minorities to be paid special attention.

25. The view that diversity management at the national and international levels was key to tackling minority rights challenges was reiterated. It was stated that civil society and minorities themselves should take an active role in lobbying for their rights.

26. Overall, the panel discussion offered an excellent platform for experts, States and civil society to discuss successful approaches to advancing minority rights protection. The role of the core principles of equality and non-discrimination was highlighted as a prerequisite for securing minority rights.

2. Expert seminar on enhancing the effectiveness of international, regional and national human rights mechanisms in protecting and promoting the rights of religious minorities

27. Organized by OHCHR in cooperation with the Government of Austria, the expert seminar was held in Vienna on 22 and 23 May 2012. The first in a series of regional consultations commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration, it focused on the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities and brought together more than 60 experts on minority rights and/or freedom of religion or belief issues, representatives of Governments, relevant regional bodies, national human rights institutions and civil society to discuss how to enhance the effectiveness of human rights mechanisms at all levels in order to better protect the rights of religious minorities.

28. Introductory remarks were delivered by the Director of the OHCHR Research and Right to Development Division; Johannes Kyrle, Secretary-General, Ministry for European and International Affairs, Austria; Heiner Bielefeldt, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; and the Independent Expert on minority issues. The introductory remarks focused on achievements and challenges under the Declaration and avenues for strengthening its implementation.

(a) Global trends in the human rights situation of religious minorities

29. Brian Grim, Senior Researcher and Director of Cross-National Data, Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life, gave an overview of a study conducted by the Forum to analyse the extent to which Governments and societies around the world impinged on religious beliefs and practices. He said that the study, which focused on constraints on religion in each country, had found that some 70 per cent of the world's population was living in countries in which Governments imposed high restrictions on religion or where there were high levels of religious restrictions in society. It had also found that some 1 per cent of the world's population lived in countries in which government restrictions or social hostilities were decreasing and that substantial increases tended to be in countries where they were already high, while the decreases tended to be in countries where they were already low.

(b) Protection of religious minorities under international human rights standards: synergies, achievements and obstacles

30. The session focused on religious minorities under the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and articles 18 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which dealt with freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and non-discrimination. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief said that all the guarantees enshrined in the human right to freedom of religion or belief, including the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, as guaranteed in article 18 (1) of the Covenant, applied to persons belonging to religious minorities and must be fully respected and preserved. He asserted that it would be wrong to define the difference between freedom of religion or belief on the one hand and minority rights on the other along an assumed dichotomy of individual versus communitarian rights. Both the right to freedom of religion or belief (article 18 of the Covenant) and religious minority rights (article 27 of the

Covenant or the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief) referred, albeit differently, to the rights of individual human beings in their multifaceted communitarian relationships.

31. He said that measures adopted to improve the situation of religious minorities should have a consistent human rights basis. In that context, the right to freedom of religion or belief on the one hand and minority rights on the other could be mutually reinforcing.

32. Nazila Ghanea, Lecturer in International Human Rights Law, University of Oxford, observed that, historically, religious minorities were the primary trigger for the institutionalization of the international framework of minority rights, spearheading efforts to bring minority rights concerns to the regional level and, later, to the international level. That background notwithstanding, religious minorities had to date not been fully addressed under modern minority rights norms and mechanisms.

33. She explained that, in recognizing religious minorities, it was important to be particularly vigilant about the need to consider non-dominance alongside numerical inferiority. Proposed definitions of religious minority could prove somewhat wanting. The State religion or ideology was a key factor in determining the power dynamics and coloured the dominance criterion in the definition of minorities. Those power dynamics would often be more significant than the numerical criterion in the process of identifying religious minorities in particular contexts.

(c) Contribution of minority rights standards to the protection of religious minorities

34. The session focused on the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and article 27 of the Covenant (on the rights of persons belonging to minorities). The Independent Expert on minority issues shared her concern for the protection of religious minorities, expressing alarm at the volume of information received from civil society members detailing human rights violations committed against them. She referred to non-traditional minority faith groups as frequent targets of restrictions, harassment and, on occasion, violent attacks.

35. She stated that the challenges to be overcome in order to improve the rights and security of religious minorities were significant and required short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions. Immediate action was required to tackle the widespread violence being perpetrated against religious minorities. She expressed regret that human rights mechanisms had often been unable to play their preventive role, which was perhaps the most important.

36. In response, Mr. Eide pointed out that many minorities differed from the majority on several grounds at the same time and that it could be difficult to disentangle the religious and ethnic dimensions. He stressed that, in human rights law, religion was part of the wider concept of religion and belief, which had a broad meaning and included theistic, atheistic and agnostic beliefs. Protection against discrimination and all acts of violence on religious grounds was essential, including to avoid ethnic tension and conflict. It was also crucial for States to adopt measures to create favourable conditions for the manifestation of religion by persons belonging to minorities, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Declaration. He

emphasized that there was a need to combine the protection of religious minorities with the quest for social stability and cohesion based on human rights for all.

(d) Strengthening the effectiveness of international human rights mechanisms in the protection of religious minorities

37. The Chief of the OHCHR Special Procedures Branch stressed that the human rights of religious minorities were violated in many ways and that such violations were not restricted only to those of freedom of religion or belief, but covered the full spectrum of civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights.

38. Highlighting the importance of the work of the 36 thematic special procedures mandate holders in advising and assisting States with regard to fulfilling their obligations, she underscored their role in providing support towards implementation at the national level. Regarding the human rights treaty bodies, she referred to their role in assisting States parties to comply with their human rights obligations through consideration of reports, individual petitions, formulation of general recommendations and, where applicable, country visits. For example, in its general comment No. 22, the Human Rights Committee had emphasized that the terms "belief" and "religion" should be broadly construed and that the application of article 18 of the Covenant must not be limited to traditional or dominant religions. In its general comment No. 23, it had established that it was not for a State alone to decide which groups constituted minorities so as to claim minority rights, but rather that that decision should be based on objective criteria, an issue of great importance to those religious minorities denied recognition as minorities and on that basis denied their rights. Other human rights treaty bodies also considered issues relating to religious minorities.

39. She stated that OHCHR had sought to create a better understanding of challenges and possible solutions relating to incitement to religious hatred. Article 20 (2) of the Covenant prohibited any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constituted incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Following an initial expert seminar in Geneva in 2008, OHCHR had in 2011 organized regional workshops on the prohibition of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred. Held in Bangkok Nairobi, Santiago and Vienna, they had been aimed at creating a better understanding of legislative patterns, judicial practices and types of State policies to tackle incitement to hatred and to propose specific actions and solutions.

40. Mr. Lattimer said that there were gaps in the coverage of human rights mechanisms with regard to the concerns of religious minorities. He drew attention to differences in terms of mechanisms to tackle ethnic discrimination and religious discrimination, recalling that, although the coverage of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was rather broad, it did not explicitly refer to religious discrimination. While religious minorities were naturally drawn to article 18 of the Covenant and the work of the Special Rapporteur on that subject, freedom of religion or belief was only a part of the problems experienced by minorities.

41. He also referred to the limitation of certain minority rights instruments, noting that, for example, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities did not offer wide protection to Muslims in Europe because a number of States parties had not accepted them as national minorities. In other areas, including in the Middle East and Asia and the Pacific, no strong regional instruments or strong

regional monitoring mechanisms existed. That state of affairs meant that protection for religious minorities was very seriously lacking compared with many other groups.

(e) Regional human rights mechanisms and other initiatives protecting the rights of religious minorities at the European level

42. The nexus between minority rights standards and the protection of religious minorities within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe was addressed first by Zdenka Machnyikova, Legal and Political Adviser, Initiative on Quiet Diplomacy. She asserted that the extensive jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights with regard to article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights) had long been significant in addressing violations of freedom of religion in respect of religious minorities.

43. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, in addition to other European minority rights standards such as the OSCE commitments, applied to the protection of national minorities. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the monitoring body of the Council of Europe, which specialized in combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance, had adopted general policy recommendation No. 5 on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.

44. Ilze Brands Kehris, Director, Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, said that Ms. Machnyikova had rightly pointed out that, while the work of the High Commissioner was to prevent conflict, he used the standards concerning the rights of persons belonging to national minorities as a key tool in his work. While there was nothing to prevent a State from including religious minorities in its interpretation of the scope of application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the instrument generally covered religious minorities as a type of national minority, rather than, broadly speaking, any religious minority.

45. Ralf-René Weingärtner, Director, Directorate of Human Rights and Anti-discrimination, Council of Europe, said that it was crucial to focus on implementation through strengthened collaboration. In addition to the Council of Europe instruments already discussed, he recalled the relevance of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and its monitoring mechanism, which had addressed, for example, the right of linguistic minorities to have religious services in their own languages. He also recalled the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and for the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity, reflecting the "never again" maxim and the need to remember how systematic hatred of a minority could lead to horrifying crimes.

46. Pia Lindholm, Equal Treatment Legislation Unit, Directorate-General for Justice, European Commission, discussed freedom of religion and religious minorities in the European Union context. She made reference to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which contained provisions referring to religion (arts. 10, 17 and 19). Article 17 provided that the Union was to respect the status of churches and religious associations or communities and to promote dialogue with churches, religious communities and philosophical and non-confessional organizations.

47. Alan Phillips, former president of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, asserted that it was important to recall that the States members of the European Union were also members of the Council of Europe, OSCE and the United Nations, and that their normative standards on religious minorities had much in common, although the organizations had diverse competences and modalities of work. He noted that, although the European Commission had capable staff, substantial financial resources and considerable powers, including to issue legal directives that were binding on member States, it was a complicated machinery, something that could affect its capacity to respond swiftly to the needs of minorities, including religious minorities.

(f) Implementation at the national level of recommendations flowing from international and regional mechanisms

48. The Chief of the OHCHR Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section said that the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, treaty bodies and special procedures mandate holders, had clearly prompted improvements in the protection of the rights of religious minorities at the national level, resulting, for example, in enhanced registration processes for religious communities and accommodation of religious dress codes in some countries. Much more needed to be done, however, given that the picture was mixed at best.

49. National human rights institutions and specialized bodies dealing with human rights could play an instrumental role. The former were often the only bodies to speak out against discrimination against minority groups, including religious minorities, sometimes in the face of trenchant public critique. There was a need to ensure that each country had a national human rights mechanism with a mandate to tackle minority rights.

50. Eva Lang, Equal Treatment Ombudsperson, Austria, noted that her work was to counsel people who claimed to have experienced discrimination on the basis of religion in their work and employment in the private sector. Most of the requests for advice received concerned questions regarding religious dress codes and symbols.

(g) Summary of discussion

51. The participants agreed that more needed to be done to encourage increased implementation of the Declaration. The interaction between the two special procedures mandate holders offered a good example of cooperation, with the Independent Expert having committed herself to focusing on religious minorities and the Special Rapporteur having decided to focus on minority rights. Increased collaboration between mechanisms, including relevant regional and national actors, could be instrumental in strengthening protection of minority rights. In that regard, the Forum on Minority Issues offered a significant opportunity for strengthened collaboration at multiple levels. Moreover, at the national level, implementation of the recommendations of international and regional mechanisms, ranging from those made by the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review to the opinions of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, could be implemented through a more inclusive process.

3. Regional consultation on the role of the United Nations and other human rights and development actors in advancing the participation of minorities in poverty reduction and development strategies in South-East Asia

52. Held in Bangkok on 25 and 26 September 2012, the consultation brought together representatives of various United Nations entities, including the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the International Labour Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, OHCHR and its regional office for South-East Asia, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the United Nations Population Fund. The International Organization for Migration was also represented. Representatives of the Department for International Development of the Government of the United Kingdom, the Asian Human Rights Commission, Minority Rights Group International, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and the Asia-Pacific Refugee Rights Network also attended.

53. The consultation was divided into five sessions. On the first day, the sessions covered the general normative framework as relevant to the rights of minorities at both the international and regional levels, in addition to human rights issues pertinent to development.

54. Within the context of the participation of minorities in poverty reduction and development, the participants examined elements that resulted in the marginalized not adequately benefiting from the Millennium Development Goals. Persistent inequalities in all areas and obstacles to meaningful participation were the primary reasons why persons belonging to minority communities were forced to accept disempowering development policies and programmes. That problem was being tackled through, among other things, national consultations on legal empowerment of the poor, which provided an entry point for legislative and policy reform actions towards achieving participation in decision-making to help to secure economic rights.

55. Evidence provided by UNDP suggested that minorities and other marginalized people managed only to reach a certain level of achievement in poverty reduction before progress stopped, while the middle class continued to make progress towards attaining the Goals. Through the UNDP Millennium Development Goals Acceleration Framework, various options were being offered at the country level to fast-track progress towards the attainment of the Goals.

56. Systematic discrimination in access to and ownership and control of land by the marginalized, including minorities, resulted in non-participation in development decision-making issues at all levels, which in turn fuelled land grabbing. That rampant problem affected minority women in particular. Solutions ranged from targeting efforts to enhance participation in decision-making to programmes that improved institutional capacity and facilitated access to legal identity and ownership documents.

57. The participants stressed that participation in decision-making must be undertaken through a bottom-up, decentralized process owned by the rights-holders; that indicators should be developed at the national level to measure economic inequality within populations and communities and between men and women; and that States must ensure that minority women had access to and control over

productive resources, including land, sustainable energies and finance, in addition to education and health care.

4. Regional expert workshop on effective participation of persons belonging to minorities in law enforcement and building an inclusive and responsive police force and judiciary

58. Organized by OHCHR, the two-day regional workshop held in Bishkek on 18 and 19 October brought together more than 70 participants. They included representatives of nine countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine), international organizations (OSCE and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, UNDP, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia), national human rights institutions, minority representative bodies and/or non-governmental organizations, in addition to international experts in the fields of minority rights and policing.

59. The first sessions focused on the general normative framework as relevant to the rights of minorities at both the international and regional levels. Human rights issues connected with the administration of justice, and in particular law enforcement, were discussed. The results of an OHCHR study on minority inclusion in law enforcement in Kyrgyzstan were presented.

60. During the discussions, the participants emphasized the importance of providing continuous training to police officers at all levels, especially senior officers. Other issues stressed were the need for reform in law enforcement to be part of a wider structural reform process; reforms regarding access to information in minority languages; the advantages of quota systems and temporary special measures to facilitate recruitment of minorities; and the need for disaggregated data.

61. Representatives of States and national human rights institutions presented their work on minority issues and highlighted achievements in connection with law enforcement and the judiciary. The presentations facilitated an open and constructive dialogue with regard to the situation on the ground at the national level. Civil society representatives questioned some of the achievements claimed by State representatives.

62. The participants explored a wide range of minority rights issues in relation to the role of the judiciary and in strengthening access to justice. The discussions focused on promoting and protecting the rights of minorities through participation and representation in the judiciary. The importance of guaranteeing independent oversight and accountability regarding the work of the judiciary and the police was stressed. The invaluable role of national human rights institutions and civil society in helping to guarantee minority rights was also highlighted.

63. The participants acknowledged the importance of making efforts to further advance minority rights with the aim of building a responsive and inclusive police force and judiciary at the national level. To that end, they agreed upon a list of recommendations that could serve as guidelines in their work.

5. Consultation on reflecting diversity in the process of constitutional reforms in the Middle East and North Africa

64. Held in Doha on 19 and 20 November, the event organized by OHCHR brought together 28 participants from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen and included legal experts, law professors, researchers, a Lebanese parliamentarian, the Independent Expert on minority issues and representatives of the National Human Rights Council of Morocco, the Social Contract Center of Egypt, the Public Liberties and Human Rights Department of the Al Jazeera network, the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, and the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat.

65. The consultation explored thematic areas such as representation of diverse parts of society in the process of constitutional reform, reforms to protect human rights, and in particular minority rights, and constitutional reform towards an inclusive society. The participants examined various aspects of the rapid constitutional developments in the Middle East and North Africa, together with the extent to which they included protection of human rights principles and minority rights. They explored ways and means through which the United Nations and other actors could support national efforts to ensure inclusive constitution-making processes that reflected the interests of various segments of the population.

66. The participants called for further guidance that could serve to contextualize the relevance of minority rights in the region. Interpretative guidance from treaty bodies in the form of general comments, recommendations and commentaries, together with interpretation from other human rights mechanisms, was highlighted as necessary to reflect the current realities of minorities. Discussions were also held as to the reluctance on the part of some groups in the region to be labelled as minorities. The need to involve minorities in constitutional reform processes was underscored and several positive and negative examples were examined.

67. Generally, the participants agreed that, while there were some promising examples of increased attention being paid to diversity in recent constitution-making exercises, there was a strong need to advocate a more inclusive approach, in particular when drafting. They also agreed that there was a need to increase awareness of the Declaration, the standards of which could be advanced also in contexts where the term "minority" was not used in national discourse.

68. The participants agreed upon the importance of raising awareness of the Declaration as an important step towards strengthening the minority rights protection regime and to devote more efforts to ensuring that new and reformed constitutions provided a strong legal framework for human rights protection consistent with relevant human rights treaties.

69. The connection between citizenship and the enjoyment of specific human rights was also examined. It was stressed that, while certain rights, such as the right to vote, might be attached to citizenship, that was not true of a number of minority rights.

B. Activities of the Independent Expert on minority issues to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration

70. The Independent Expert participated in the OHCHR-led events in Vienna on 22 and 23 May and in Doha on 19 and 20 November. In addition, on 9 November, she participated in the Fifth Budapest Human Rights Forum. The 2012 event featured minority issues to mark the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration. She discussed the important role of the United Nations in tacking challenges facing the implementation of the Declaration. She also spoke about her role within the context of her own mandate and that of guiding the work of the Forum on Minority Issues by preparing its annual meetings and reporting its recommendations to the Human Rights Council pursuant to resolution 19/23.

C. Fifth session of the Forum on Minority Issues

71. The fifth session of the Forum was held on 27 and 28 November 2012, focusing on identifying positive practices and opportunities in implementing the Declaration. Chaired by Ms. Maiga, the session opened with a video message from the Secretary-General and statements by the President of the Human Rights Council, Laura Dupuy Lasserre, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

72. More than 400 people participated in the Forum, including representatives of Member States from all regions, minority groups, United Nations bodies, mechanisms and specialized agencies, regional intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations.

73. The participants discussed challenges to the implementation of the Declaration and good practices. Governments were invited to present their views in that regard and on the impact of the Declaration on national legislation, policies and practices. Other representatives, including those of minorities, non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions working in the area of minority rights protection and promotion, United Nations bodies, mechanisms and specialized agencies, regional intergovernmental bodies and young people from minority communities were invited to participate and share their views on how the Declaration helped to meet the challenges facing minorities and what could be done to improve its relevance and implementation.

74. In conformity with Human Rights Council resolution 19/23, the outcome of the session included a set of action-oriented thematic recommendations that were presented by the Independent Expert on minority issues to the Council (see A/HRC/22/60).

IV. Conclusions

75. **The twentieth anniversary of the Declaration afforded an important opportunity to raise awareness and visibility of and encourage reliance on the provisions of the Declaration in advocating minority rights. It also offered an opportunity to examine the achievements and challenges with regard to implementation, in particular in relation to the role of States. The various**

anniversary activities revealed that, while there had been some achievements, States should further strive to meet their legal obligations to protect minorities. While some States have taken important steps to recognize the existence of minorities and diversity, others continue to insist on the homogeneity of their populations. All States have minorities and their existence, identity, religion and culture need to be protected in line with international human rights law.

76. **The targeting of religious minorities and institutions, xenophobic attacks and racial profiling, as well as systematic exclusion of minorities from decision-making in economic and public life, have the effect of undermining human rights and sustainable development, in addition to fuelling insecurity and conflict. They stand as constant reminders of the necessity to join hands in efforts to protect minorities. Overall, the commitment of States, international, regional and national mechanisms and non-governmental organizations must be strengthened and sustained in order to live up to the promise of the Declaration.**

United Nations A/68/305

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 August 2013

Original: English

Sixty-eighth session
Item 48 of the provisional agenda*
Assistance in mine action

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, covering the period from August 2011 to July 2013, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/69, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it at its sixty-eighth session on the implementation of that resolution and on follow-up to previous resolutions on assistance in mine clearance and mine action, including relevant United Nations policies and activities.

2. Peace and stability are essential prerequisites for socioeconomic development. United Nations interventions and programmes in mine action continue to enable the protection of civilians, peacekeeping and political missions, humanitarian assistance, early recovery and development. Mine action enables the safe deployment of United Nations personnel, access for humanitarian aid, the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons and their access to basic services. As a direct result of mine action, socioeconomic and development programmes can be implemented. The report demonstrates the relevance of mine action across key areas of United Nations work, including human rights and international humanitarian law. It describes the activities and achievements of the 12 United Nations entities comprising the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action[1] and their efforts to integrate mine action in each of those key areas.

* A/68/150.

[1] The 12 United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes are: the United Nations Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Observer entities include the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the World Bank and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

13-42397 (E) 130913

Please recycle

3. Mine action is multifaceted, cross-cutting and carried out in complex and challenging environments. It is people-driven, with dividends measured in lives saved, roads and airports cleared, schools reopened, land returned to agricultural use and countries joining international humanitarian and human rights instruments, to name but a few. The present report features the positive changes that have taken place since the previous report on this subject (A/66/292), in particular in the effective response of the United Nations to the needs of peoples and countries and the strengthened partnerships and coordination established through the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013-2018 and its recommendation to establish, in the United Nations Mine Action Service, a United Nations monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The report provides a few illustrations of the capacity of the United Nations to adapt to new challenges and its renewed commitment to delivering as one. The report concludes with recommendations drawn from observations of the important changes and promising new directions the United Nations has initiated in mine action. It is of the utmost importance that the Organization continue to work efficiently for a world free of the threat of explosive hazards.

II. Update on international instruments related to mine action

4. The United Nations has advocated for the universalization and implementation of existing legal frameworks relevant to mine action and encouraged States to further enhance the protection of civilians from the scourge of landmines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions, and from the effects of explosive weapons used in populated areas. In doing so, the United Nations has worked in close collaboration and cooperation with interested States, civil society and other relevant regional and international organizations.

5. With each new ratification of international humanitarian and human rights instruments, more lives are saved and more countries enjoy increased stability and security — conditions conducive to sustainable development. I reiterate my ardent call for the universalization of these critical instruments.[2]

6. To date, 161 countries have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention). Over 44.5 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines have been destroyed and 154 States parties no longer hold stockpiles of anti-personnel mines other than small quantities of previously unknown stocks discovered after deadlines had expired and anti-personnel mines that they are permitted to retain under the provisions of the

[2] Relevant normative frameworks include the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention), the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons), its amended Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices and Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Convention for training purposes. Three non-compliant States parties continue their efforts to destroy their stockpiles.[3]

7. I welcome the significant achievements of the Congo, Denmark, Guinea-Bissau, Jordan, Nigeria and Uganda in declaring completion of clearance obligations in this period. Nine States parties requested an extension of the 10-year deadline. I urge that the utmost support be given to those requiring assistance.[4]

8. The Eleventh and Twelfth Meetings of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, held in Phnom Penh from 28 November to 2 December 2011 and in Geneva from 3 to 7 December 2012 respectively, considered progress and the remaining challenges in pursuit of the aims of the Convention. At those meetings, States parties reviewed the implementation of commitments of the Cartagena Action Plan 2010-2014, adopted at the Second Review Conference of States Parties to the Convention. Notably, at the Twelfth Meeting, they agreed on a response to States parties that discover previously unknown mined areas after deadlines have passed and provided an overview of the process for requests for extension of the 10-year deadline for the destruction of all mines. The request for extension from Afghanistan was considered a model submission, containing solid evidence and a sound explanation.

9. To date, 115 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons).[5] Ninety-eight States have consented to be bound by amended Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices annexed to the Convention and 82 States by Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention.[6] The Fourth Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention was held in Geneva from 14 to 25 November 2011 and focused on negotiations on a draft protocol on cluster munitions. While the parties were unable to reach agreement on the draft protocol, decisions were taken on a new mandate concerning mines other than anti-personnel mines, an Accelerated Plan of Action on Universalization of the Convention and its annexed Protocols, a renewed mandate for the Convention sponsorship programme and an enhancement to the compliance mechanism of the Convention.

10. Consistent with the scope of Amended Protocol II, the Conference discussed and exchanged information on improvised explosive devices, related incidents, their humanitarian effects and preventative measures. Significant efforts continued to compile existing guidelines, best practices and recommendations aimed at addressing the illicit use of materials for such devices. The parties also more closely

[3] Belarus, Greece and Ukraine.

[4] Algeria, Chile, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Eritrea in 2011 and Afghanistan, Angola, Cyprus and Zimbabwe in 2012.

[5] Antigua and Barbuda, Burundi, the Dominican Republic and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines joined in 2011-2012.

[6] The Dominican Republic and Gabon consented to be bound by Amended Protocol II. Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, Gabon, Honduras, Italy, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Panama, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa and Turkmenistan consented to be bound by Protocol V.

tracked their progress towards implementing obligations under Protocol V and agreed to a new reporting template on victim assistance.

11. To date, 112 States have signed and 83 States have ratified the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Fourteen States parties declared completion of their obligations on stockpile destruction, with some 744,231 cluster munitions and 85.8 million explosive sub-munitions destroyed.[7]

12. At the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, held in Beirut from 13 to 16 September 2011,States parties decided to establish an implementation architecture and intersessional work programmes. At the Third Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention, held in Oslo from 11 to 14 September 2012, reviewed progress, welcomed the Oslo progress report on implementing the Vientiane Action Plan adopted at the First Meeting of the States Parties and discussed the establishment of an implementation support unit, mandating the President to present establishment and funding model proposals to States parties for approval.

13. Since the last report, 133 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and 77 have adopted its Optional Protocol. The United Nations continued to encourage Member States to accede, emphasizing the relevance of addressing the rights and needs of victims.

III. Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations in mine action

14. The mine action landscape has continued to evolve over the past two years. In addition to existing mine action interventions, new armed conflicts in Libya, Mali and the Syrian Arab Republic have exposed civilians to threats from landmines, explosive remnants of war, cluster munitions, improvised explosive devices and increased use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The United Nations has been increasingly requested to ensure people's security and to respond to humanitarian emergency needs. For instance, along with building national capacity, the United Nations Mine Action Service has been requested to integrate into its existing programmes projects focusing on risk awareness and management of improvised explosive devices and the security, management and destruction of weapons and ammunition stockpiles. In this regard, a body of specialized training material has been developed and used in training sessions provided to United Nations personnel and civil society organizations.

15. With support from the international community, affected States, such as Afghanistan, Cambodia, Croatia and Sri Lanka, have made noteworthy progress in addressing the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions.

16. Nevertheless, several countries remain severely affected by landmines, such as Afghanistan, Cambodia and South Sudan. I am concerned about reports of new laying of anti-personnel mines in places such as Colombia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand and Yemen. I strongly condemn this and call upon

[7] Afghanistan, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Grenada, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia and Spain.

all parties to renounce the use of these indiscriminate and inhumane weapons. I also call upon countries in a position to do so to increase support to mine action programmes.

17. The United Nations continues to receive requests to provide an effective response in the immediate aftermath of conflict by rapidly deploying response teams of mine action personnel, coordinating mine action interventions and building national capacities. Whether in a mission setting or following a humanitarian emergency, the rapid response teams of the United Nations Mine Action Service (the Standing Mine Action Capacity) have enabled an effective response to be provided in the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya and Mali.

18. Synergies between mine action and other activities, such as security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, have been strengthened by the effective use of specialized skills and tools against the threats of unsecured and/or poorly managed stockpiles. This was the case in Côte d'Ivoire under the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), Somalia and South Sudan.

19. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit on its evaluation of the scope, organization, effectiveness and approach of the work of the United Nations in mine action is contained in document A/68/63. Throughout the evaluation process, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action worked closely with the Joint Inspection Unit to provide it with input, facts and clarifications. My comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report are contained in A/68/63/Add.1.

20. The activities and achievements presented in the report reflect the actions taken and the importance I attach to the fulfilment of mandates for effective and coordinated mine action by one United Nations.

A. Integrating mine action within the United Nations system and global frameworks

21. Mine action is a critical component of peacekeeping and special political missions based on its explicit inclusion in mission mandates, its contribution to the protection of civilians and the safe conduct of mandated peacekeeping, humanitarian and developmental activities. During the reporting period, mine action activities have been integrated into 10 peacekeeping missions[8] and 2 special political missions,[9] as well as the United Nations Support Office for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

[8] The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA, established on 25 April 2013), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), and the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS, closed on 9 July 2011).

[9] The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL, established on 16 September 2011) and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

22. Numerous references have been made to mine action in my reports to the Security Council on peacekeeping and special political missions,[10] especially in relation to the impact of explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and poor security, management and disposal of ammunition stockpiles. Mine action was also included in a number of reports to United Nations bodies, including those on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, on children and armed conflict; on the protection of civilians in armed conflict; and on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict. Furthermore, mine action was included in briefings to the informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians and in the most recent open debate in February 2013. Management of weapon stockpiles was included in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in August 2012 (A/CONF.192/2012/RC/4, annex I).

23. As an enabler of development, humanitarian relief and the protection of civilians, mine action has continued to be integrated in the Global Protection Cluster and in the Consolidated Appeals Processes/Common Humanitarian Action Plan for 2013. Dialogue and exchange of information between relevant United Nations and humanitarian actors on emerging crises and conflicts has improved between field-based entities and Headquarters under the Global Protection Cluster process led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with the Mine Action Service as the lead entity for the mine action area of responsibility.

24. The United Nations and bilateral, multilateral and civil society development agencies have also integrated mine action into their programmes both as an element in and enabler of development.

25. The United Nations has continued to implement the gender guidelines for mine action programmes. In addition to adherence to gender requirements in contracting and funding procedures, particular attention has been paid to collecting data on mine action, disaggregated by gender and age. I continue to attach great importance to the mainstreaming of gender in all programmes and recommend that the Mine Action Service, as mine action focal point, provide programme managers on a regular basis with relevant training, guidance and advice, in cooperation with relevant entities.

B. Coordination and partnerships

26. Coordinated mine action programmes and policies within the framework of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action have been strengthened under the chairmanship of the Mine Action Service. The Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013-2018 is "people-driven" and reiterates the continuous strong commitment of the Organization to saving lives and creating conditions conducive to sustainable peace, security, development and respect for human rights. The strength of the Strategy resides in the fact that it is the product of an inclusive consultative process led by the Mine Action Service and involving all members of

[10] These include reports on Afghanistan, Central African Republic and Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Nepal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan (including Darfur), Syrian Arab Republic and Western Sahara.

the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, both affected and donor countries, and practitioners such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, non-governmental organizations and civil society. It reaffirms the cross-cutting nature and relevance of mine action to the full range of work of the United Nations. It also acknowledges the evolution of the scope of the concept of mine action, which now encompasses the types of explosive hazards that threaten populations, thus demonstrating the adaptive capacity of the Organization to new situations for an effective response to people's needs.

27. In implementing the Strategy, the United Nations system organizes its priorities and resources around four strategic objectives, increasing its ability to act in a more effective, accountable and efficient manner. In no order of priority, those objectives are (a) saving lives and reducing the negative socioeconomic impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war; (b) supporting mine action assistance efforts for victims, linking them with broader health-care and disability agendas; (c) reinforcing the commitment of the United Nations to enhancing effective national capacities as prerequisites for the timely and sustainable transfer of mine action responsibilities to national ownership; and (d) reflecting the significance of mine action as a precursor to, and an enabler of, peace, security, stability, humanitarian relief and development on national, regional and international agendas. I will see to it that effective results- and evidence-based advocacy and outreach promote a better understanding of the multifaceted nature of mine action in the promotion of peace processes, ceasefire negotiations and national strategies in forums such as the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Peacebuilding Commission.

28. The United Nations remains committed to the principles of transparency and accountability when measuring progress and assessing the effectiveness of its mine action projects and programmes in affected States. Efforts to this end will be enhanced by the establishment of a United Nations monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the implementation of the Strategy on Mine Action 2013-2018. At the request of the members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, the Mine Action Service was tasked to develop, host and maintain a system to benefit the entire United Nations mine action community. I urge Member States to support this commendable initiative and encourage States in a position to do so, to commit the necessary resources to enable the Mine Action Service to design, operate and maintain this system and train a core set of stakeholders in the use of measurement tools and indicators.

29. The Global Protection Cluster led by UNHCR has engaged closely with the Mine Action Service as the lead entity for the mine action area of responsibility to develop its annual workplan. The workplan reflects the Global Protection Cluster strategic framework of (a) increased support to the field and (b) increased global engagement on protection issues. A web page for the mine action area of responsibility on the respective websites of the Global Protection Cluster and the United Nations mine action gateway, E-MINE, will facilitate the dissemination of information on emergency situations and promote greater coordination between protection and mine action actors. The Global Protection Cluster will continue to support the mine action area of responsibility in implementing the Strategy on Mine Action 2013-2018, particularly the strategic objectives of reducing risk and supporting victim assistance.

30. Dialogue, consultation, coordination and exchange of information with non-governmental organizations and implementing partners has intensified with the arrival of the new Director of the Mine Action Service. Gatherings related to mine action, such as meetings of treaty bodies, the annual meetings of the mine action sectors in Geneva, meetings of the Steering Committee on Mine Action, the United Nations-NGO forums that take place in the margins of the large mine action meetings, and missions to post-conflict zones were all used as opportunities to discuss matters of mutual interest.

31. Closer cooperation and dialogue were fostered with members of the Mine Action Support Group, chaired by Australia, whose secretariat is supported by the Mine Action Service.

32. Within the cooperation framework of the Coordinating Action on Small Arms and pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 64/51 and 66/42, the Office for Disarmament Affairs continued to develop the international ammunition technical guidelines, together with the Mine Action Service. The Service provided expert support and promoted the operationalization of the guidelines, which aim to improve national stockpile management capacity in order to prevent the growth of surpluses and address wider risk mitigation.

33. The threat and use of improvised explosive devices affects many places where the United Nations has a presence, such as Afghanistan, Kenya, Libya, Mali and Somalia. At my request, the Department of Safety and Security facilitated the development of a comprehensive policy, approved in November 2012, on the approach of the Organization to the threat posed to United Nations personnel and facilities by improvised explosive devices. The Mine Action Service provided two experts on improvised explosive devices and members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, in particular UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Mine Action Service, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), contributed to the elaboration of the policy.

34. The Mine Action Service enhanced its leadership within the United Nations system by building in-house expertise in training on, and detection and destruction of, improvised explosive devices. In so doing, it has also strengthened its capacity not only to provide expert advice and training to its United Nations and non-United Nations partners, but also to assist States in the removal and destruction of abandoned improvised explosive devices; awareness, recognition and reporting of such devices; and organic capacity-building to mitigate threats from them. In conjunction with its implementing partners, the Mine Action Service has developed a mobile phone application for safety training on landmines and explosive remnants of war. The free application will be launched later in 2013. It aims to maximize access to life-saving training for United Nations staff, humanitarian aid workers and the general population. Future versions will contain expanded information on the threat of explosives and appropriate mitigation measures.

35. The understanding, awareness and importance of mine action have grown in African Union peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.[11] In order to achieve the

[11] The Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity adopted resolution CM/Res.1593 (LXII) on the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the problems posed by anti-personnel mines in Africa. Pursuant to that resolution, continental conferences of African experts were convened in May 1997, September 2004 and September 2009, which resulted in an African common position on anti-personnel landmines.

goal of a landmine-free Africa and strengthen the mine action capacity of its member States, the African Union, with support from the United Nations Office to the African Union and the Mine Action Service, is finalizing a mine action plan for 2013-2015. Through the continuation of joint activities between the African Union and the United Nations and their implementing partners, this plan aims to facilitate cooperation and support among African Union member States, including the transfer of capacity among States, assistance in compliance with legal instruments related to mine action and resource mobilization. I welcome this joint African Union-United Nations mine action initiative at this crucial time when both institutions are increasingly training and deploying together in heavily contaminated areas, while a number of African Union member States approach their completion deadlines under legal instruments and the United Nations plans for timely transfers of mine action responsibilities to national ownership.

C. Good practices supporting the mine action community

36. Within the framework of the meetings of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action and the mine action area of responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster, the United Nations monitors threats posed by mines and other explosive remnants of war. Requests from States, emerging threats and recommended responses are reviewed to coordinate effective rapid responses, as in the case of the deadly accidental explosion of an ammunition depot in the Congo in March 2012, the continuing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the joint assessment mission to Myanmar in June 2012.

37. Joint meetings of the United Nations, national and civil society representatives and commercial operators continue to prove useful in providing a forum to exchange information, experience, good practices and lessons learned. They are a platform for decision-makers and implementers to better understand each other's perspectives and challenges. Organized by the Mine Action Service and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, with the support and participation of members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, the fifteenth and sixteenth meetings of mine action national programme directors and United Nations advisers were held in Geneva in March 2012 and April 2013 respectively, gathering over 350 active participants around a substantial and field-focused agenda.

38. The United Nations has continued to promote South-South cooperation in the area of knowledge and expertise exchange among States affected by mines. UNICEF facilitated the visit of a governmental delegation from Iraq to Sri Lanka to exchange ideas about methodologies proven to be successful and effective in Sri Lanka, including in risk education and data collection. UNDP facilitated visits of representatives from eight mine-affected countries to Cambodia to learn from its technical and management experiences. In Côte d'Ivoire, the Mine Action Service arranged visits of delegations from Africa, including from Chad, the Congo and Darfur, to share successes in weapons and ammunition management.

39. Public outreach continues to be an effective method of raising the profile of and mobilizing mine action. Through field trips, outreach and the use of traditional and social media across the system, the United Nations has captured the voices of those most vulnerable, generated global solidarity, especially with survivors, and emphasized the continued urgency for action among key decision-makers. In 2013, the E-MINE website (www.mineaction.org) has been updated so that key

documents, funding information and other resources can be easily accessed. Approximately 2,500 visitors access the website every week. Numbers rise significantly during events such as the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. In 2012, the day was marked with a global campaign called "Lend a leg for a mine-free world" during which United Nations Goodwill Ambassadors, heads of agencies and civil society organizations in over 70 countries joined in rolling up their trouser leg or shirt sleeve in solidarity with survivors. In 2013, field programmes marked the Day and exhibitions were held in Brussels, Geneva and New York, together with the Government of Germany and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

IV. Resources and funding

40. Funding for the mine action sector has remained consistent. The majority of funds were directed to a small number of States and territories and primarily allocated to mine clearance, which is only one of the five mine action pillars.[12] However, direct international support for victim assistance programmes declined by $13.6 million, a decrease of 30 per cent from 2010.[13]

41. During this reporting period, funding channelled through the voluntary trust fund managed by the Mine Action Service amounted to $107 million. The top five donors were Japan, the European Union, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and Australia. Allocations were directed to 24 countries and 1 territory.[14] In addition to country-level support through the voluntary trust fund, critical support was provided for advocacy, coordination and the Standing Mine Action Capacity. The trust fund functions as an inter-agency trust fund; allocations have been provided to key United Nations partners, such as UNDP and UNICEF, and to a total of 12 other beneficiaries from national partners to international and non-governmental organizations. The Mine Action Service continues to pursue innovative public-private partnerships.

42. Peacekeeping assessed funds for mine action totalled over $223 million for the period from 1 July 2011 through 30 June 2013. Troop-contributing countries also provided mine action capacity in direct support of mission mandates. Thanks to the administrative support provided by the United Nations Office for Project Services, the Mine Action Service has been able to implement projects in peacekeeping operations.

43. In 2011 and 2012, donor funding through the UNDP Thematic Trust Fund for Crisis Prevention and Recovery and UNDP country offices totalled $76 million, supporting 25 national mine action programmes.[15]

---

[12] These also include mine risk education, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and advocacy.

[13] *Landmine Monitor 2012*.

[14] Afghanistan, Albania, Cambodia, Chad, Colombia, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda, State of Palestine and territory of Western Sahara (MINURSO).

[15] Including in Albania, Algeria, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Chad, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Jordan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda and Yemen.

44. Every year, on behalf of the United Nations, the Mine Action Service produces an overview of funding requirements for mine action projects that affected countries plan to execute with the support of the United Nations and international and national partners. The *Portfolio of Mine Action Projects 2013*, now published only in electronic format (see www.mineaction.org), featured 220 projects by various partners submitted by 25 countries and territories, representing a total budget of $361 million. The annual active stakeholder participation is a testament to the value placed on coordinated initiatives.

45. Support has also been provided through in-kind contributions, including from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, which have been crucial to the rapid response efforts of the Mine Action Service to emergencies in Afghanistan, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Mali, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the State of Palestine.

V. Mine action response at country level

46. Affected States, supported by the international community, have achieved considerable progress in reducing the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions. This is reflected most notably in a drastic reduction in casualties from landmines over the last two decades, increased national capacity and transition to national ownership and progress in assisting victims and survivors through disability and human rights frameworks.

A. Reducing the humanitarian and socioeconomic impact

47. Significant strides have been made towards ensuring greater freedom of movement, access to basic services and improved livelihoods for those at risk of suffering the negative socioeconomic impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war. In 2012, for example, over 100,000 vulnerable, conflict-affected communities were reported by UNDP to have benefited from improved livelihoods through access to land, housing, social services and other infrastructure in Cambodia, Lebanon and Sri Lanka. This enabled 43,000 internally displaced persons to return or resettle, underlining the strong correlation between land release and improvement in livelihoods.

48. In Afghanistan, the work of 14,000 Afghan deminers employed by the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan cleared 364 communities of explosive hazards. The United Nations Mine Action Service supported community-based demining and risk education activities, with approximately 1.4 million people receiving risk education by April 2012. The destruction of 41,264 mines and 1,287,743 items of explosive remnants of war resulted in further casualty reduction. Over 1 million people benefited from demining activities by gaining access to agricultural land, irrigation, roads, health centres and other infrastructure. A survey from 2011 supported by the Mine Action Service indicated that the value of land in one village had increased by 245 per cent following mine clearance.

49. In Albania, Guinea-Bissau and Iraq, UNDP continued to build the capacity of national authorities to address residual contamination. In Albania, the Albanian

Mines and Munitions Coordination Office received support through the implementation of a programme to clear unexploded ordnance hotspots.

50. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite a steady decline in new mine victims, poverty, coupled with illegal logging and scrap metal collection, remain the main causes of mine incidents on more than 1,300 km^2 of land suspected to contain mines. UNDP has continued to provide policy advice, technical support and assistance with the destruction of munitions stockpiles and obsolete ammunition.

51. In 2012, Cambodia recorded its lowest annual number of casualties due to mines or explosive remnants of war since 1989. Clearance rates and land release were at historic highs, some 40 per cent above the level achieved between 2005 and 2010. With support from UNDP, about 700 households benefited from agricultural land release, training and the provision of seeds, fertilizer and agricultural equipment, thereby doubling their income. UNDP supported the clearance of 609 hectares, releasing 347 hectares for agriculture, 186 hectares for housing and the rehabilitation of infrastructure and 76 hectares of paddy rice. UNICEF supported mine risk education for 490,000 Cambodians and responded to 97 per cent of 14,000 requests from affected communities.

52. Following the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad in 2011, mine action partners including UNDP, the Mine Action Service, UNICEF and non-governmental organizations, facilitated mine clearance and assisted the Centre national de déminage humanitaire in building national capacity in threat reduction and victim assistance. Lacking funding, the Mine Action Service was forced to suspend its operations in April 2013.

53. In Colombia, the Mine Action Service and UNDP continued to support the establishment of the legal and technical framework required for civilian demining. UNICEF provided technical expertise, advocating for the safe and impartial conduct of activities. Following initial deployment of a civilian capacity, a total of 594,122 m^2 and two municipalities were declared free of the threat of mines. The Mine Action Service supported the development of a coordination system for civilian mine clearance, national guidelines, technical standards, procedures for accreditation, quality assurance and information management to improve civil and military mine clearance operations.

54. In March 2012 in the Congo, an unmanaged ammunition depot exploded in Brazzaville, killing over 280 people, destroying hundreds of homes and public buildings, injuring 1,500 and displacing some 20,000 people. The Mine Action Service led an emergency response to secure high-risk areas and established a coordination centre for clearance. Some 84,844 items of unexploded ordnance and 1,347,667 items of small arms ammunition were destroyed. UNICEF deployed a risk education expert to support the Government, non-governmental organizations and United Nations staff in developing, field-testing and producing mine risk education materials and providing psychosocial support to affected communities.

55. In Côte d'Ivoire, where the post-electoral crisis in 2011 left a trail of explosive remnants of war, the Mine Action Service worked with UNOCI to support protection and stabilization efforts. In addition to the destruction of unexploded ordnance in Abidjan, a physical security and stockpile management programme was implemented to rehabilitate and secure 51 obsolete and poorly managed ammunition storage facilities according to the standards of the international ammunition

technical guidelines. The Mine Action Service supported a voluntary civilian weapons collection by the National Commission for Small Arms and Light Weapons and a pilot disarmament operation of ex-combatants led by the national Authority for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. It also led a community-based project on the reduction of armed violence in the western part of the country near the border with Liberia.

56. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ongoing insecurity, adverse weather and insufficient funding have continued to negatively impact mine action efforts. Following the escalation of fighting in North Kivu Province in November 2012, the Mine Action Service immediately deployed experts in risk education and the disposal of explosive ordnance to protect vulnerable populations and humanitarian actors and secure, in 24 hours, the safe reopening of Goma airport. Verification and clearance opened 2,537 kilometres of roads and 1,030,903 m^2 of land, mainly in the east, and risk education was provided to 191,848 individuals. The Mine Action Service supported the safe storage, removal and destruction of ammunition stockpiles in Kisangani and Kinshasa.

57. Support for training, accreditation and technical and quality assurance for the clearance assets of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon continued, with the support of the Mine Action Service. The visible marking of the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon, now over 90 per cent complete, is a crucial step towards long-term peace and security in the area. UNDP has supported national authorities in the clearance of 5,680 hectares of land contaminated by mines and 3,808 hectares of land contaminated by cluster munitions, thus improving food security and increasing income from agriculture. Approximately 2,650 people increased their farming capacity after land release in 2012.

58. In Libya, the Mine Action Service coordinated the early mine action emergency response and supported the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Through the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who recognized it as an important component of the United Nations team, the Mine Action Service provided technical advice to the Libyan authorities on mine action, weapons and ammunition management. UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Education to integrate risk education into schools. The Mine Action Service, in cooperation with all relevant government entities, including a number of local military councils, secured hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of ammunition. Over 115,000 individuals received risk education throughout Libya and some 175,000 explosive items were destroyed, releasing infrastructure and enabling freedom of movement, access to basic services and improved livelihoods.

59. In Mali, faced with increased fighting, existing and new contamination from explosive devices and the prevalence of small arms and light weapons, as well as an ongoing population displacement, the Mine Action Service conducted an emergency assessment of explosive threats and, together with UNICEF, supported risk education. It quickly began providing coordinated assistance, expertise, training and equipment to the Malian defence and security forces and the African-led International Support Mission in Mali. The Mine Action Service deployed international mine action operators to accessible priority areas to survey, mark and clear dangerous areas and provide risk education to affected communities.

60. Following the ceasefire agreements, the Mine Action Service led an inter-agency mission to Myanmar in June 2012 comprised of UNICEF, UNDP and

the Office of the Special Adviser on Myanmar. In collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and non-governmental organizations, UNICEF organized the first ever mine risk education workshop in the country to be followed by nine more. It also supported the establishment of a governmental coordination mechanism for mine risk education. With support from the United Nations and mine action non-governmental organizations, the Myanmar Mine Action Centre is currently developing national mine action standards and a mine action strategy for consideration by the Government.

61. In the State of Palestine, the Mine Action Service, together with the Palestinian Authority, supported the establishment of a mine action centre. The Government of Israel agreed that international stakeholders could begin humanitarian demining in the West Bank by late 2013. In Gaza, the Mine Action Service coordinated an efficient emergency response following the escalation of hostilities in November 2012, which included the removal of unexploded ordnance hazards stored in urban areas and the destruction of over 1,500 explosive remnants of war.

62. In Somalia, where it has been present since September 2007, the Mine Action Service continued to provide support to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali security sector for coordination, capacity-building and management of explosives. Large-scale clearance and mine risk education activities were implemented, in collaboration with UNICEF and non-governmental organizations, throughout south-central Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland and Mogadishu. These activities minimized the humanitarian and socioeconomic impact of explosive hazards, allowed humanitarian actors to deliver life-saving assistance and enabled AMISOM to fulfil its mandate safely. Over 360,000 Somalis received risk awareness messages, including in newly accessible areas of south-central Somalia. For the first time, the police in Mogadishu were trained to respond systematically to call-outs for explosive threats, identifying and securing over 1,300 items, including over 100 improvised explosive devices. More than 20,000 unexploded items and 151 anti-personnel mines were safely destroyed, leading to an immediate reduction in the explosive threat to thousands of returnees.

63. In Sri Lanka, UNDP noted that the mine action sector employed 3,268 people and 10,845 households of conflict-affected communities benefited from resettlement through land release, while 122 people benefited from victim assistance. UNICEF supported the Government in the coordination and management of risk education, victim assistance and advocacy. It is noteworthy that mine risk education was included in the 2012 school curricula and exams.

64. In the Sudan, lack of access to hazardous areas, due to the continuing conflict in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile States, greatly impeded mine clearance activities. There were 103 casualties in 2012. Of those, 31 were killed and 72 were wounded, representing the highest number of victims since 2005. The current estimated number of 300 registered hazardous areas requiring clearance is likely to increase as surveys are conducted in conflict-affected areas. Meanwhile, the Mine Action Service supported mine risk education for local communities with the translation of the national technical standards and guidelines on mine risk education.

65. In Darfur, the Mine Action Service supported the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur in ensuring the protection of civilians and safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. Surveys and clearance activities were undertaken in 314 villages covering an area of 1,030 km^2 and 7,065 km of roads and

risk awareness training was provided to 164,116 individuals. During 2012, there were 28 separate incidents, with 12 people killed and 28 injured.

66. In South Sudan, the Mine Action Service made significant progress in protecting civilians, mitigating risks and enhancing freedom of movement in support of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and national communities. Clearance focused on essential roads suspected of having been remined by non-State armed actors, with 90 per cent of them deemed safe for passage. The clearance of 1,455 suspected hazardous areas released over 34 million m^2 of land and community-based mine risk education was provided to nearly 393,000 individuals. A total of 2,256 anti-personnel mines, 261 anti-tank mines and 34,045 pieces of unexploded ordnance were destroyed, with approximately 677 known threats remaining. Since 2004, a total of 4,705 people have been killed or injured in incidents involving mines or unexploded ordnance.

67. In Abyei, the Mine Action Service surveyed and cleared land to facilitate the safe deployment of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei, safe passage to returnees and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Following the establishment of the joint border verification and monitoring mechanism, the Mine Action Service provided additional operational support and training to monitoring teams.

68. In response to the outbreak of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2011, including the widespread use of heavy weapons, landmines, explosive weapons and the use of cluster munitions, the Mine Action Service deployed a rapid response team to the region in partnership with the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. The Mine Action Service provided risk education and joined the United Nations humanitarian team in October 2012. As the conflict continues to date, the Mine Action Service, UNICEF and other partners have developed a toolbox of risk education materials to help mitigate threats to civilians. UNICEF is supporting the integration of risk education into schools and the dissemination of safety messages through the mass media. In support of the humanitarian community, the Mine Action Service has collected data and digitized maps reflecting incidents. Planning for eventual clearance and risk management activities is in progress at Headquarters within the inter-agency task force for the Syrian crisis and in the field.

69. In the territory of Western Sahara, the survey, marking and clearance of dangerous areas and the destruction of explosive items by the Mine Action Service in support of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara continued to improve the safety of communities east of the berm, mission personnel and aid workers operating throughout the region. Due to the shortage of water and grazing land, clearance efforts have prioritized cluster strike areas in order to facilitate access for nomadic populations. Since the previous report, 5.24 km^2 of land have been cleared and released to local communities and information on risk awareness was provided in response to an increase in accidents caused by cluster bombs, notably among children and young people.

70. In Yemen, successive wars and recent conflict with Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula have extended the area suspected of contamination by mines and explosive remnants of war to 34 km^2, nearly 40 times the size of the contamination area established in 1999. Sophisticated improvised explosive devices targeting civilian populations have become a serious concern. Twenty humanitarian deminers were injured and eight killed by such devices during the reporting period. UNDP

and the Mine Action Service have provided technical support to the National Mine Action Committee and the Yemen Mine Action Centre, while UNICEF supported risk education initiatives. UNDP also provided financial support.

B. Strengthening victim assistance through human rights and disability frameworks

71. The United Nations is determined to strengthen the integration of victim assistance into broader disability frameworks aimed at promoting and protecting the human rights of persons with disabilities. The new United Nations Strategy on Mine Action 2013-2018 is anchored in a human rights-based approach to mine action in general and victim assistance in particular. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other human rights instruments also provide essential frameworks to ensure respect for and protect the human rights of survivors and respond to their needs.

72. At least 30 Member States and 3 other areas affected by cluster munitions have reported victims: 10 are States parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, obligated to comply with the provisions of the Convention on victim assistance.[16] The Vientiane Action Plan provides guidance on prioritizing assistance implementation. The Plan builds on the commitment of States parties to improve victim assistance and promote the rights of survivors and other persons with disabilities under the Cartagena Action Plan 2010-2014.

73. In 2012, UNDP assisted 4,600 landmine survivors living in extreme poverty in Angola, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Uganda by facilitating training and supporting access to grants for livestock and microenterprise start-up kits and to government employment.

74. In Afghanistan, the Mine Action Service provided capacity development to key governmental bodies, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled, with the aim of ensuring that the rights and needs of persons with disabilities, including landmine survivors, are addressed through training of teachers and health workers and the mainstreaming of disability into basic and community health-care packages.

75. In Angola, the National Intersector Demining and Humanitarian Aid Commission, supported by UNDP, assisted 548 survivors of incidents with mines or unexploded ordnance with training and small business development support. Additionally, 137 secondary teachers and 23 specialists with disabilities were assisted in positioning themselves within the State education sector.

76. In Cambodia, UNICEF supported governmental rehabilitation and community self-reliance services for 1,600 children, reintegrating 376 children with disabilities into schools.

77. In Colombia, the Programme for Integrated Mine Action, with support from the Mine Action Service, UNDP and UNICEF, worked with ministries, local authorities and civil society to ensure the integration of victim assistance into the broader frameworks of the national victims law and land restitution.

[16] Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Guinea-Bissau, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Montenegro, Mozambique and Sierra Leone.

78. In Egypt, 727 survivors registered and qualified for government pension and microenterprise start-up grants supported by UNDP. Four local non-governmental organizations were identified and equipped to broker $200,000 of revolving microcredit funds providing individual loans of $450 to $2,250, enabling survivors to start microenterprises and develop sustainable income-generating activities that would improve their livelihoods and benefit themselves and their community. Key stakeholder consultations with traditional leaders, local business representatives and survivors of mines and explosive remnants of war paved the way for clearance. This enabled the implementation of sustainable initiatives geared towards enhancing local economies and job creation on the north coast of Egypt.

79. In Sri Lanka, UNICEF supported victim assistance to persons with disabilities, including landmine survivors. Efforts focused on strengthening the capacity of non-governmental organization partners and relevant Government agencies.

80. In South Sudan, a human rights-based approach to disability surveillance and data collection in support of a national disability policy has been adopted. The Mine Action Service supports its implementation. Together with UNMISS, it also consulted with the Government on its declared intention to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

81. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Mine Action Service provided physical rehabilitation and socioeconomic reintegration support in the Kivu provinces, Katanga and Kinshasa and continued to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities.

82. In Darfur, the Mine Action Service supported the establishment of a victim assistance coordination mechanism, led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, to advocate for the rights and needs of landmine survivors.

83. Thanks to clearance and mine risk education, Tajikistan is reaching a near-zero casualty rate. The Tajikistan Mine Action Centre continues to receive support from UNDP. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is supporting demining and the International Committee of the Red Cross supports mine risk education and victim assistance. In 2012, more than 2.1 km^2 along the border with Afghanistan were surveyed, cleared and released. UNDP programmes benefited 544 survivors through microcredit initiatives and marketable vocational skills and 35 survivors of mine-related accidents benefited from income-generating projects and psychosocial rehabilitation. Risk education reached nearly 75,000 people, 40 per cent of them children.

C. Promoting capacity development and transition to national ownership

84. The United Nations has worked with national counterparts in numerous countries to build local capacity and promote national ownership. With the humanitarian imperative of clearing mines, the United Nations provides training, advice and support to mine action authorities with the goal of transition to national ownership.

85. With the support of the Mine Action Service, the transition of mine action to full national ownership was completed in Afghanistan. In April 2012, the Department of Mine Clearance of the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority became fully integrated into the Mine Action Coordination Centre. It is

managed entirely by a skilled and experienced Afghan team, with the Mine Action Service providing support on a needs basis only. With technical support from the Mine Action Service, the Government of Afghanistan submitted a 10-year extension request under article 5 of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention, including a plan to declare Afghanistan mine-free by 2023.

86. In Colombia, the Mine Action Service and UNICEF conducted advocacy for humanitarian demining and technical support throughout the initiation of civilian humanitarian demining. As a result, the capacity of the programme for integrated mine action and the National Office for Humanitarian Demining was strengthened with regard to national standards, accreditation, planning, quality assurance and monitoring methods.

87. In Côte d'Ivoire, the Mine Action Service worked with key governmental institutions, including the National Commission for Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the Ivorian security forces to promote capacity development and national ownership. Eighty engineers of the Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire and 20 gendarmes received training in clearance and 60 national security officers were trained in ammunition management and destruction. With the support of UNDP, a best practice guide on ammunition stockpile management was developed in French for consolidation into national standards, along with a guide on small arms and light weapons. In December 2012, the Mine Action Service supported Côte d'Ivoire in the submission of its transparency report and declaration of compliance with the Ottawa Convention, following the destruction of 842 anti-personnel mines.

88. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government adopted a national law on mine action establishing the Congolese Centre for Mine Action in July 2011. The Mine Action Service is working with national authorities to draft a multi-year national transition plan, which will include training the staff of the Centre on granting accreditation to qualified mine action operators.

89. In Egypt, UNDP supported the establishment of the executive secretariat headquartered at the Ministry of International Cooperation, which serves as a coordination unit among civilian government departments, the military, civil society, the United Nations and the donor community on all matters related to demining and leading and engaging local organizations in mine risk education and victim assistance to maximize impact.

90. In Ethiopia, UNDP supported the transfer to the Ministry of National Defence of full responsibility for handling all mines and explosive remnants of war.

91. Lebanon, with the assistance of UNDP, the Office for Disarmament Affairs and others, hosted a successful Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Beirut in 2011, reinforcing the leadership that affected States bring to international forums.

92. In Libya, the Mine Action Service, assisted by UNDP and UNICEF, led the development of a national mine action strategy. Efforts have continued to focus on supporting the establishment by the Government of a national mine action, weapons and ammunition management structure.

93. Mozambique completed the transition from demining operations led by the United Nations to a nationally owned demining programme. UNDP continued to

provide capacity development, resulting in funding support from partners for the national completion plan in accordance with treaty obligations.

94. In Nepal, UNICEF continued to provide technical support to the Government and national partners as the transition to national ownership of mine action made progress.

95. In Senegal, UNDP supported mine action authorities by focusing on technical advice on quality assurance and mine clearance for socioeconomic development.

96. In Somalia, mine action efforts continued to focus on the disposal of explosive ordnance and training to counter improvised explosive devices for AMISOM and Somali security sector personnel. In October 2012, Somalia became the 160th State party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

97. In Sri Lanka, the United Nations country team has provided extensive support to the national mine action programme since 1999. The planning, coordination, quality and information management, survey, mine risk education and victim assistance capacities of the programme were strengthened, enabling the transition to an entirely Government-owned mine action programme by the end of 2013.

98. In the Sudan, following the closure of the United Nations Mission in the Sudan in 2011 and at the request of the Sudanese authorities, the Mine Action Service supported the capacity development of the National Mine Action Centre towards national ownership transition in 2013 and the establishment of national ordnance disposal offices in all five states of Darfur.

99. In South Sudan, the Mine Action Service supported the development of the National Mine Action Strategic Plan 2012-2016 for the National Mine Action Authority, including national capacity development on mine action coordination and management functions, training and deployment of explosive ordnance disposal teams of the South Sudan Police Service. With the technical support of the Mine Action Service, South Sudan acceded to the Ottawa Convention and produced its first transparency report in 2012.

100. In April 2013, a guide to transitioning mine action programmes to national ownership was published by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining with support from the Mine Action Service. Based on nine country case studies, the guide presents practical perspectives on how to plan and implement transitions by examining context, establishing processes and addressing challenges. Commissioned in 2010 by the Centre and the Mine Action Service, the final guide also included inputs from UNDP and UNICEF, as well as multiple partners in each country case study.

VI. Observations and recommendations

101. Mine action has made major strides through concrete results and proven solutions, while promoting international norms, yet the work is far from over and significant challenges remain. I am especially concerned by the continued use of anti-personnel mines by armed groups reported in Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand and Yemen in 2011 and 2012 and new mine and cluster munitions usage reported in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. Continued diligence and commitment are needed from all parties so that efforts to eliminate

landmines and the explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions, are not undermined by the opportunism of a few.

102. From the standpoint of international law, the body of jurisprudence covering mine action is an excellent example of the humanitarian, socioeconomic and environmental benefits of effective disarmament agreements. This should inspire us to continue our common efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians against the effects of conventional weapons. I reiterate my deep concern about the devastating and indiscriminate impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and call for continued attention to this humanitarian tragedy.

103. The landscape in which the United Nations mine action operates has evolved as a result of the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, unsecured and unsafe ammunition stockpiles and the circulation of illicit small arms and light weapons. I appeal to Member States to take these threats seriously. The United Nations stands ready to provide expert and technical support to affected countries. I look forward to continued cooperation among United Nations partners in the development of policies and instruments designed to respond to these security threats at the country level.

104. I welcome the United Nations Strategy on Mine Action 2013-2018 and commend the consultative and well-coordinated process leading to its finalization. The Strategy will help the United Nations focus its resources and priorities in mine action. I also welcome the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to strengthen the efficiency, transparency and accountability of United Nations mine action. I call on those in a position to do so to provide the necessary funding for the establishment and operation of this important tool.

105. I reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to work towards a world free of the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions. I call upon the international community to underline the significance of mine action on international agendas. I wish to stress, in particular, the need to feature the rights of victims and survivors of explosive hazards, including mines and cluster munitions.

106. Mine action is instrumental in bringing about long-term peace and security, the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and the protection of human rights. Whether in the context of accidental explosions or the threat posed by mines left over from conflicts, it is critical that the United Nations increase its rapid response capacity, such as the Standing Mine Action Capacity of the United Nations Mine Action Service. I call on the Mine Action Support Group to increase support for such life-saving interventions.

107. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to all United Nations staff working in mine action for their determined efforts to support our vision of a world free from the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions. I pay tribute to all those who have lost their lives in the line of duty and condemn in the strongest terms all attacks against mine action personnel. Such attacks must be seen as attacks on the fundamental values of peace, security and humanitarian assistance which lie at the very core of the work of the United Nations. In view of the highly insecure environments in which mine action personnel operate, I commend them for their continued dedication and commitment to providing life-saving services to vulnerable communities.